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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

INFORMATION REPORT

COUNTRY Poland

SUBJECT Conditions in the Gdynia Area: Rising Cost of Living/Prices/Consumer Shortages/Education/New Passports/Coastal Security/Western Radio Reception.

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1. conditions in the Gdynia area date through early May 1953.

Rising Cost of Living

2. The cost of living has increased in Poland since food ration cards and price regulations were abolished. A fishing skipper's family of five, with a monthly income of 1,000zł - a considerable amount today - has a struggle to keep going. It can afford meat only once a week. (Meat can be bought in state shops only)

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peasants are entitled to sell their produce publicly and at free market prices if they can produce a certificate that they have executed all their compulsory deliveries. The delivery quotas are so large that the peasants keep the surplus for themselves). Breakfast is generally bread, butter, sometimes a little cheese and tea or coffee substitutes. The children take sandwich lunches to school. The evening meal consists of a thick soup with potatoes and other vegetables. For these modest meals the housewife needs about 30zł a day. The family's two-room flat in a Gdynia suburb costs 170 zł a month. The 700 kg of coal which the family receives as an annual allotment at regulation price is not enough. About 300 kg must be bought on the black market. The housewife must sometimes queue at 4 am to get a special commodity. The family has no luxuries. Entertainment is limited to the radio and a very occasional cinema. Since the devaluation [3 January 1953], through which everybody lost money, the fishermen have had to work harder and harder. Sometimes they come in with their catch and put out again that same night, after the WOP has inspected their boat. Officially they are entitled to one free day each week, but they only get free time during heavy storms. They are also entitled to a fortnight's annual holiday, but this comes during the worst weather.

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- 2 -

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3. How can a worker's family with, say, 600 zł per month exist? Only by having a little garden somewhere or breeding goats and rabbits. The wife must work too. Polish families try to avoid as long as possible the wife going to work if she has small children. The Poles have a strong family feeling and want to educate their children themselves. They feel that the state kindergartens (złobek) are badly managed and have been turned into vehicles of Communist propaganda. Mothers send their children to these kindergartens most unwillingly. [] a widow who was a streetcar conductor with a monthly salary of 340 zł. In order to do her job she had to put her child in a kindergarten.

4. Only prominent CP members, state officials, sailors and famous artists and writers who are supported by the State or CP can maintain a decent living standard in Poland. The former intelligentsia and professional people, especially if they are old with no children to help them, have perhaps the hardest lot. [] an elderly man who had been a distinguished physician. Often his daily meals consist of bread alone.

Prices

5. The average housewife may start shopping at 6 am because she has to queue for almost every commodity, even milk. Some of the Gdynia prices in early May 1953 were:

Milk	-2.5 zł per liter
Eggs	-1.20 zł each
Bread	-1.80 - 4 zł per kg
Lard	-40 zł per kg.
Sausages	-35 - 55 zł per kg
Beef (with bones & waste)	-23 zł per kg.
Veal	-30 zł per kg.
Worker's overalls	-350 zł
Ready-made suit (60% wool)	-1200 zł
Men's socks	-15 zł
Cheapest men's shoes	-550 zł
Good men's shoes	-1200 zł
Shirting	-35 zł per meter
Nylon stockings	-180 - 220 zł a pair
Chiffon kerchief (apaszka)	-150 zł
Stylon stockings (Polish nylons)	-120 zł
Simplest women's stockings	-40 zł (wear out immediately)

About the 20th of each month the queues shorten; the people have spent their wages.

Shortages of Consumer's Goods

6. Women's stockings are perhaps the hardest item of clothing to find, even if one has the money. Flannelette, and all sorts of tailor's supplies, such as buttons, hooks and eyes and sewing machine needles are very scarce. Leather is scarce; everybody walks on rubber soles.

7. There is a shortage of all types of tools. When one [] became a fishing skipper he had to apply to the ARKA management five times in order to get the most necessary equipment for his cutter. It is impossible to get the tools needed for repairing a cutter. No hammers weighing over 400 gms are sold. There are no bicycle chains. The bicycles sold to shockworkers by the state firm MOTORZBYT are damaged German models dating from World War II. Many of them have been burnt. The firm repairs them, paints them and sells them as new for 950 zł each. Shock workers also have priority on radio sets.

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50X1-HUM

50X1-HUM

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50X1-HUM

- 3 -

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8. There is a severe shortage of all kinds of building materials: bricks, cement, tar, planks, nails, sheet iron, roofing board. A special permit from the Rada Narodowa is required before one may buy such materials. Without a permit one cannot even buy the nails to repair a rabbit hutch. It is very hard to maintain a home because such materials are rarely issued to private individuals.

Housing Shortage

9. In Gdynia, and indeed everywhere on the Polish coast, the housing shortage is severe. Communists and officials, and their friends, can always get a flat, but not an ordinary citizen. In spring 1953 an ARKA official got a solemn promise from the Flat Distribution Office (Urząd Kwaterunkowy) that he would get a flat at Lembork; he even inspected it. His wife was to move in while he was at sea. Upon his return to shore he found that the flat had unexpectedly been given to some Communist. The head of the Urząd Kwaterunkowy in Gdynia has a luxurious villa.

Trade

10. All retail trade in Poland is nationalized with the exception of small tailor's or shoemaker's shops run by the owner alone or with one or two apprentices. Most of the former tradesmen work in cooperative societies as the taxes of individual artisans are prohibitive. Private tailors and shoemakers have a sporting chance as the cooperatives are so badly supplied with raw materials that they cannot fill all orders. The shoemakers' cooperative can only repair shoes; it can get little leather to make new ones. The private shoemakers buy leather from sailors who smuggle it in from abroad. They also smuggle in shoes. These command good prices, since the Polish shoes are ugly and of a very poor quality.
11. The sailors do a flourishing trade in smuggled goods and are the most well-to-do people in Gdynia. If they do not sell direct they sell to a commission (secondhand) shop. Quite illegal. There is much smuggling of medicine.
12. the only private retail shop left in Gdynia is a kiosk on Swietojska which sells fruit. The shops selling religious articles (sklep z dewocjami) have been liquidated. But most churches have a small stall for such articles.

Education

13. The son of one of the skippers of our group has been studying since 1952 at the ballet section of the Szkola Sztuk Plastycznych in Orlowo. This is a junior college (four year course). The first foreign language is Russian; the second is French because that is considered necessary for ballet. Politics are important in the curriculum. The skipper sent his boy there because in Poland today a ballet dancer earns much more money than a doctor of medicine. Since the boy has artistic talent, his best future lies in being a dancer.

Coastal Security

14. No special new security regulations have been issued for the coastal zone during 1953. Now as before, it is forbidden to be on the seashore between sunset and sunrise without a special permit showing that one has an official reason to be there. No fishing cutter may sail out alone; they go out in groups (zespoly). The skipper of each cutter is responsible for his cutter, and one skipper is responsible for the group. He maintains radio contact with the fishing cooperative and with the cutters. Fishermen may take only their working clothes to sea. To board a cutter, one must either belong to the crew or have a WOP permit. Then the WOP checks a cutter, upon departure and return, it looks everywhere; the engine, the water tanks, the crates of fish, the fishermen themselves. Upon return to port the skipper surrenders to the WOP the microphone of the cutter's radio and any leftover fuel. One WOP inspection unit (eight men) usually checks two cutters, taking two to four hours.

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- 4 -

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15. People with relatives abroad are being deported from the Polish coast.
16. Letters entering Poland are usually censored at Slupsk. Letters entering by sea are also censored at Szczecin, Gdynia and Gdansk. Letters coming from the West by rail or air are censored at Warsaw. The letters are opened so neatly that the recipient usually cannot detect that his mail has been read.

New Passports

17. It is widely rumored that free movement within Poland will be forbidden after everybody has been issued the new passport. People believe that it will become impossible to move from town to town without a permit. As of early May 1953 only one out of every two persons in Gdynia had been issued a new passport. When the passport is to be issued the person receives a summons from the militia to come and get it. A fisherman who is issued a passport must leave it in the safekeeping of the militia; he is not permitted to carry it with him on sea duty. He picks up the passport on the first floor of the militia building in Gdynia, then hands it over against a receipt to an official on the second floor where the militia archives are kept. The passport contains notes on the residence of the bearer and any change of address, also his place of work and any change thereof. From this passport, which everybody (except fishermen) must carry with him, the militia or UB can check immediately where a person lives and works.

Radio Reception

18. Almost everybody in Poland has a chance to listen to Western radio broadcasts. Radio Madrid is most popular among the general public, with Radio Free Europe second. The people prefer Madrid because it will criticize the Anglo-Saxon powers. Many people have grown disappointed with RFE: 'RFE promises us liberation, but what is being done? The Communists tighten the screw each day. What is the sense of RFE talking about freedom? It is one of those empty promises of which we have heard too many. They tell our young people not to undertake anything against communism. That is sensible. But they say nothing about when and how freedom will come. We just hear more talk about peace'. Nevertheless, people listen to RFE. It comes at a convenient time. Nine pm and later are the best times for listening to the Western radio. Political news and comments and reviews of the international situation interest everybody. The humorous talks of Sektorek over the BBC are also popular. Actually, the radio is the chief encouragement that people have.
19. Officially it is not forbidden to listen to foreign broadcasts. It is the dissemination of information received that way that is prosecuted. However, if a person is known to listen to Western broadcasts he gets put on a blacklist. Sooner or later another reason for his arrest or deportation presents itself.
20. Unfortunately the jamming of Western broadcasts is very powerful and sometimes one can hear nothing at all. There is a jamming station at Kamienna Gora in Gdynia. They put a tinkle (brzeczek) on the RFE wave. As most Polish receivers have a very narrow wave divider (waski rozdziel fali), it is impossible to avoid this tinkle.

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